

(Monday, November 7, 1916)

## THE WAR AND OUR CANADIANS AT THE FRONT

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I HAD the opportunity of addressing this Club some 15 or 18 months ago. I am sure we all then hoped, we probably expected, that the war would be over before this time. Our expectations have not been realized.

So to-day my subject is: "The War and Our Canadians at the Front."

We have sent over 250,000 Canadian men to take part in the war. We did it because we were British citizens; because as such we were interested in the causes and results of that great conflict. But let us not lose sight of the importance and deep significance of our action. We have voluntarily embarked upon a war with the greatest military power of the world. Whatever it could have been before we sent our troops across the seas, from that day on and to-day it is Canada's war just as much as Great Britain's. And we cannot carry on our share in that great war with Germany and Austria on a limited liability principle. We have gone into it, and our national future depends upon our helping to see it through to a successful conclusion.

The events of the past few months must have brought the war very close home to many Canadian homes; but one cannot visit England and France and then return home to Canada without noticing a distinct change in atmosphere. Our distance from the actual scenes of conflict seems to cloud our appreciation of its magnitude and significance. One needs to be at the front, to see the actual conditions under which our men are fighting, to appreciate adequately their heroism and sacrifices.

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We in Canada have, following the policy of our Government, enlisted, organized and partially trained our forces. Then we send them overseas, where they complete their training, and when that training is complete they pass over to France to take their part in the struggle. We have had two principal training camps in England, Shorncliffe and Bramshott. At Shorncliffe was completed the training of reinforcing battalions; Bramshott has been used principally as a training camp for battalions that are going to form new divisions.

The western front, on which our Canadian troops are fighting, is 500 miles long. The extreme western end is held by the Belgians, supported partly by French troops. The next section, from the Belgian line down to the junction with the French army at the Somme, is held by troops of our Empire—from England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and elsewhere. Our Canadian corps was holding part of the Ypres salient when I was there, and none had as yet gone to the Somme. I cannot say how many miles we were holding; it was really a comparatively small section of the front, and we held these few miles with 70,000 men. When you pause to think that the battle line on the western and eastern fronts together is considerably over 2,000 miles in length, it gives you some faint conception of the magnitude of this great struggle.

It would look as if the young men of the progressive nations of Europe, assisted by citizens of the other sections of our Empire, were face to face in a death struggle for individual supremacy. Indeed at many times it is a struggle for individual supremacy; but it is really vastly more than that. Do not lose sight of the fact, as an inspiration to continue in this struggle, that while fighting for individual supremacy they are settling the whole character of the civilization which our children shall enjoy. Our fathers through the years and centuries of blood, struggle, toil and sweat, have won the liberties which we inherit. Shall we pass them on unimpaired to the generations yet to come? That is the task of this generation.

We had then at the front an army corps of three divisions, with 70,000 men. It is a complete fighting unit, comprising infantry, cavalry, artillery, Army Service Corps, Army Medi-

cal Corps, Engineers, everything complete save for the air service, which is supplied by the Imperial Army. I was glad, however, to find in the British air squadron some Canadians, amongst whom I met Flight Lieut. Macaulay, of Montreal, who is doing splendid service with that squadron. Personally, I venture to express the hope that we shall soon establish our own air service, so as to complete the fighting forces at the front for Canada. The reason we have not an air service is not because we have not many Canadians in the air service. It was a matter of gratification to me, and will be to all Canadians, that British officers have told me that they preferred the Canadians in this service, because when it came to a difficult and dangerous flight the Canadians had the courage and nerve to face it and risk the consequences, and the British officers told me they admired their pluck.

In Sir Julian Byng, who commands our Canadian forces at the front, we have a British officer in the prime of life, who has had large experience all over the world, and much experience in this war. He was in command of the British forces in Egypt when the war broke out, and immediately returned to England, where he had command of the 3rd cavalry division which was at the first Battle of Ypres. He was also at the Dardanelles until he succeeded to the command of the Canadian Army Corps.

I spent four days with our Canadians at the front, going in and out amongst them, and seeing the conditions under which modern war is carried on, and I count those four days amongst the most memorable of my life—I would not forego that experience at the front for anything I know.

The Ypres salient is not a healthy spot, as our men say, but I did not find one of our men who was not prepared, and glad, to go there. While they were holding a section of the Ypres salient, they were only holding half of it. The crack corps of the British army, the Guards, held the other half of that vital part of the front, where the Germans twice tried to hack their way through to Calais and the sea. When Britain wanted that vital point firmly held for the Allies she sent the Guards to take care of one half, and the Canadians to the other. And if many sons of Canada have fallen in that section of the front they lie side by side with the flower

of the British army, and many of the flower of the French army; for what was left of the British Army after Mons and the Marne, the strength and glory of the first British expeditionary force, was sacrificed after that memorable first battle of Ypres, whose anniversary we are commemorating at the present time.

I had the very great privilege of getting right up to the front. If I had only been with the forces for a day I should never have got there. I was told by the General that it was not permitted for civilians to do so, but when I had been with the troops for two or three days he relented, and let me up to the very front lines, and it was my good luck to have a Montreal man as my guide while there, Captain Talbot Papineau.

When we got to the front lines, the General in command said: "No, there is too much activity. I would not feel justified in letting you enter the trenches, but if you will spend the night with me at my headquarters"—it was General Rennie of Toronto—"I will take you to the trenches early in the morning." I gladly accepted the invitation. After dinner he said he was glad I was there, because there was "a bit of a show" on, which meant a lively time for the Germans. The Somme, of course, was the "big show," and this was to be a "little show" conducted by our Canadians. The general told me that at a certain hour our batteries would start bombarding the Germans' trenches, according to the scientific principles adopted in this war, which is always run exactly along a carefully planned time schedule.

I was taken to a position between our batteries and the front lines where I could witness this bombardment. I can assure you that the first sensations of a civilian with guns behind him shooting at something in front of him is not very comfortable at first, but one soon begins to realize that it is safe with the shells flying overhead, so that except for occasional stray bullets which whizzed past we were fairly comfortable. It was a glorious night, the moon and stars shining, while the whole battle line was lit up by German flares to illuminate No Man's Land—and on our part of the front the trenches only run from 40 to 200 yards apart.

The bombardment commenced, and the shells went

shrieking over our heads, and amidst the sound of the shells and their sharp explosions one heard the crack of rifles and the bang bang of the machine guns, the dull heavy explosions of the shell mortars. As we stood there I thought of what our gallant troops—for the Germans were responding in lively style—were subjected to day after day and night after night. When we came back I had a feeling not merely of respect but of affection for those gallant men who are so cheerfully risking and laying down their lives for us.

Next morning, just before 4 o'clock—I will not say I was awakened because I did not sleep very much in these novel and perilous surroundings—but I was conscious of a resumption of the artillery fire. I thought it was the Germans retaliating and that any time a big shell might reach the general's dugout; but the general said, "No, it is our guns bombarding again. I don't know what it is all about, because it is not on the programme, but we'll find out at the trenches." There we learned that the Germans had given our men rather a hot time of it with trench mortars and machine guns, and they had sent back word asking the artillery to respond and silence the Germans' fire. It evidently accomplished its purpose, for in half an hour or so our artillery ceased firing—and within five minutes the birds began singing in the trees, such are the contrasts between peace and war at the front.

I wish I could tell you about the trenches. We went to the firing line held by a Western Ontario Regiment, the 18th Battalion. I will only say this, my first impression was one of surprise at seeing so few men there—that was because I did not understand military procedure. There is no use keeping a large number of men in the firing lines and exposing them to unnecessary danger. It is only necessary to have a few sentries and snipers and observers and especially machine guns there. Under ordinary conditions they are able to cope with the situation and the rest of the men are in the trenches behind, near enough to be speedily available when wanted.

I saw the German positions through a periscope and that is the only way one wants to see them, because their snipers are just as active as ours. The snipers have a habit of putting a nick on the butts of their rifles for every German they

bring down, and I was introduced by the General to his champion sniper, who had no less than 76 nicks in his rifle.

When we left the front trenches and came to the communicating trenches I saw the rest of the battalion. Some were asleep in the trenches after the work of the night, others were dressing and performing their toilet, shaving, etc., under the open sky, cooking their breakfasts, etc. If we could only have forgotten that all the time they were under German fire, we should have thought it was a pleasant and comfortable party on an outing. I cannot describe the situation further, but let me add this. I that morning looked on the faces of gallant Canadians who the night before had entered the trenches full of life and hope, now silent and peaceful in their last long sleep. I could not but feel "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends."

I found our men physically fit and looking exceedingly well. There was scarcely a friend—and I met many there—who did not look more robust and fit than when they left. Some of them, noticeably the officers, had markedly aged—who would not age living week by week and month by month under such conditions, particularly with the added responsibility of having men under their charge?

It was fine to see the men. They were all so ready for anything their officers called upon them to do. They went out there to fight. They went out there to put as many Germans out of action as it was possible for them to do; and, notwithstanding the casualties that are bound to come, our Canadians are never so happy as when they are doing the work which they crossed the seas to do.

I found on all sides the greatest appreciation of our Canadians and their work. In the early days, after the second battle of Ypres, when we received those descriptions by cable and in the press of how our Canadians had saved the day, some of us thought that perhaps they were giving us a little more than cold justice. But I learned from soldier and civilian alike that those early despatches did not overstate the case. The Canadians in the face of the greatest difficulties, because of the rapid retirement of the French Colonial troops in the face of the poisonous gases, used then for the first time, had to extend their lines to double their length. Those men,

fresh from the office, the factory, the farm, unaccustomed, many of them, to arms, and facing the finest troops of Germany, held their position hour after hour, day after day, and did save the day, and barred the way to Calais and the sea, and made the Germans' ultimate success in this war impossible. If I may sum up the opinion of British public men and officers it would be in the words of Asquith himself, who said to me of our Canadian troops: "None have fought better—none could have fought better."

I found the same appreciation in France, and may sum up the general opinion there by the expression Premier Briand used to me when he said: "None of the allied soldiers are more welcome in France than those splendid men, who have won imperishable glory for themselves and their country in this war." These tributes from the first men of Great Britain and France tell of the estimation in which our troops are held by the men of those countries.

When I talked to our soldiers I asked them "Isn't there anything I can do for you when I get back to Canada; isn't there any help I can render?" I don't know how many of them gave me practically the same answer, so I feel I am fairly justified in taking the answers I received as fairly representing their thoughts. Their first thought was "Take good care of the wounded who go home." In the face of ever present danger hour after hour they were not thinking of themselves but of their wounded comrades; and their first appeal to us in Canada was to take good care of the wounded who should come home. Unless we do so we shall not only fail to do justice to those gallant men who are at the front, but fail to do what is fair and right to the men who have made the supreme sacrifice in this battle for the right.

The next thing they thought of was the success of the cause. They said: "Send us men and more men and still more men." They are not under any illusions at the front as to the strength of the Germans' forces or as to the courage and determination of the German troops. Nor are they under any illusion as to their own capacity, for, having measured strength with them day after day and month after month, our Canadians are absolutely satisfied that they, with the British, the Australians, the New Zealanders, South Africans

and French are, man for man, better than the German soldier, and under even conditions can win a glorious victory in this war.

I told some of the officers that we would give them a glorious welcome back to Canada, and one of them said to me: "I never expect to go back to Canada. I came with the Canadian troops when they first came here. I have been exceptionally fortunate. Most of my brother officers have fallen, and it is scarcely humanly possible that I should expect to see this war through." Yet, with that feeling, brave and courageous and with a cheerful smile he was going ahead doing his day's work. And that is the feeling of all our men. I was talking with another of the Princess Patricias at the ramparts of Ypres, just after a serious engagement. Just the night before they left the trenches they lost six men by German shell fire, and of these six belonged to the very small remnant of the men who left with the battalion after it was formed. And of those five four had been entitled to leave, and had been offered their leave before going to the trenches this time. But they said they would not take it, there were so many new men as reinforcements, and they must be there to help steady the line and keep up the record of the Princess Patricias.

So they deliberately and freely went back, and went to their deaths. Do you mean to tell me that the people of Canada, recognizing the heroism and devotion of such men will not provide the men and reinforcements needed? It is incredible if they know the facts. Our men over there are prepared to fight and ready if need be to die—but when the flag falls from their hands who will take it on unless we send reinforcements? Are these reinforcements really needed? Let me tell you something not generally known. At scarcely any time during the past summer did we have sufficient men in Great Britain who had completed their training to provide the necessary reinforcements at the front.

Our men were awaiting a Fourth Division to relieve the First Division and give them a much needed rest, for they had had no rest period since they first started in this struggle. But while the coming of this Fourth Division was delayed because there were not enough troops for them, they had to



be broken up for reinforcements. Even that did not provide enough men, and we had to send men to the front who had not yet completed their training when they went over. And, unless we take it in time now and provide the necessary new men and get them in process of training we shall next summer duplicate this summer's conditions. We have the men over there now. They were sending them over by the thousand during the last two months, but the reinforcements were not there when they were most urgently needed.

What has happened to our gallant First Division? When the Fourth Division went over they were so badly needed that this gallant First, which had borne the brunt of the day ever since they first went into the trenches, got their vacation and rest by marching to the Somme, facing death and danger there, and adding additional glory to their fame and Canada's.

And how those men have fought—the men of the 13th., 22nd., 42nd., 73rd.! This last week I have received letters from officers and men at the front, and one of our Ontario officers telling of a Montreal battalion, and I single it out because it so happens he deals with it, said: "I would like to tell you of what the 22nd. did at Courcellette. Officially, I can add nothing to the facts. My Company relieved them on the 17th. of September, and I saw what they did. No troops, not even the Guards, could have done better." If the Province of Quebec has been at times slow in recruiting, the heroism of Tremblay and his men will atone for a great deal. He had two officers besides himself and 60 men left in his battalion, but I believe that since then a good many other men have turned up who were missing at that time.

My officer friend who spoke to me about it was himself in the advance the next day, and was severely wounded by machine gun fire through the body, and later he tells with appreciation of Tremblay's having come to see him. Those soldiers know neither race nor creed, they are simply fighting side by side to overcome a common foe. The last man who spoke to me as I left the Canadian front was the chauffeur, Bouillon, a French Canadian, and when he bade me goodbye he said: "When you go back to Canada will you tell the boys to come out and help us? Tell them not to be afraid. It is

just like baseball, only instead of catching the ball you dodge the shells, and you soon get used to that."

Knowing the record of the British Canadians, and the French Canadian regiments from this Province, is it believable that this Province, any more than our own Ontario, will let these regiments fall out of the lines for lack of reinforcements? They have added imperishable glory to both Quebec and Ontario, and I feel sure that we shall not let the standards fall for want of men. When I spoke to Mr. Asquith of what had been achieved by the British Army in this struggle, he said: "I was never more convinced than now that we did the right thing, and I am absolutely convinced of ultimate victory. But Great Britain could not have done what she has done but for the support of the Dominions."

Our spontaneous co-operation stirred the heart of the Motherland, as it stirred the heart of France, and strengthened their resolution and nerved their will and increased their power. And if final victory is to be achieved in this struggle it will only be by the Dominions standing squarely and heartily by the Motherland and seeing her through.

Let me add this one word. A distinguished Japanese officer, commissioned by his government to visit the allied powers and study on behalf of his government particularly their naval forces and operation, said to me—and these Japanese officers are particularly skilful and shrewd observers—"The two revelations of this war are, first the spirit of France, her marvellous unity, courage, patience, resolution and invincible determination to achieve victory." and what was the second? It was "the spontaneous support of the Motherland by her Dominions in all parts of the world."

We live too near the events of our own time to appreciate their mighty significance. But our standing by the Motherland was not only notice to Great Britain, but notice to all the world from the new nations that had arisen in the west, in the east, and in the south, "In this great day of Armageddon, when Great Britain is fighting to the death for justice and liberty, we all stand together."

That is one of the great moving compelling events of history, and even though we may not yet appreciate its full significance the other nations of the world do. God grant

that, after the sacrifices made by the noble men from your city and your province and from our city and our province, who have laid down their lives to preserve this liberty and this freedom for us and for the strength of our Empire, we utterly resolve that that unity so gloriously manifested shall be maintained through all the days that lie before us.